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*Message from the Chair*

*Matching surgical care resources to patient need to ensure timely and appropriate care is the key challenge for governments and health providers across the country.*

*With this issue of the E-News, I'm pleased to report excellent progress on three priority initiatives that will help health system partners in Saskatchewan meet this challenge.*

*Targets Time Frames for Surgery that provide "performance goals" for the surgical care system, based on varying levels of patient need, have recently been announced, while the new Patient Assessment Process and the Surgical Patient Registry move toward full implementation. Very shortly, for the first time across the province, Saskatchewan will have accurate and detailed information about:*

- How many patients are waiting;*
- How long they are waiting;*
- Which procedure they are waiting for; and*
- Their level of priority*

*The benefits of these initiatives will soon be apparent, as our surgical care system becomes better at predicting OR time required for various types of surgery and direct resources more effectively. Surgeons will also have access to more detailed information when finalizing the roster of patients having surgery.*

*I am confident that better management and better decisions based on improved information will ultimately lead to shorter wait times for those patients who are currently waiting too long.*

*Saskatchewan continues to lead the nation with its vision for managing surgical care. I encourage all surgical care system partners to watch for upcoming announcements and further developments over the next few months as the current priority initiatives continue to unfold.*

*Peter Glynn, Ph. D.  
Chair, Saskatchewan Surgical Care Network*

**Target Time Frames for Surgery:  
Another Exciting “First” For SSCN**

SSCN has announced another crucial phase of its strategy: the establishment of Target Time Frames for Surgery. Identified as a priority in *The Action Plan for Saskatchewan Health Care* and unveiled by Health Minister John Nilson on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, these targets represent performance goals for the surgical care system. They will allow better monitoring and tracking of patients, and help to ensure they receive care according to their level of need.

Target Time Frames were developed and recommended to the Minister of Health by the SSCN and its Surgical Services Subcommittee, chaired by Dr. Rob Weiler.

The following grid expresses how they are organized. (For example, The Priority Level I goal is that 95 per cent of patients will receive their procedure within 24 hours):

**Target Time Frames for Surgery**

<b>Priority Level</b>	<b>Scoring Range</b>	<b>Target Time Frame</b>
Priority I	95 to 100	95% within 24 hours
Priority II	80 to 94	95% within 3 weeks
Priority III	65 to 79	90% within 6 weeks
Priority IV	50 to 64	80% within 3 months
Priority V	30 to 49	80% within 6 months
Priority VI	1 to 29	80% within 12 months
All Cases		Within 18 months

Surgical patients will be assessed by surgeons and receive a score based on their condition and the urgency of the procedure required. This score will correspond to one of the six Priority Levels, giving patients a better indication of their relative need for surgery.

Each year in Saskatchewan, more than 90,000 surgeries are performed. According to the latest surgical system data available, 50% percent of the surgeries completed in operating rooms in Regina and Saskatoon combined were done in 10.3 weeks or less (July – December 2003). Over the same six months, 91% were done within 18 months.

Saskatchewan Health will work immediately with health regions on two key targets. Cancer surgeries will all receive a minimum of Priority Level 2, meaning the goal will be to complete those surgeries within three weeks. The other focus will be on the target of completing all surgeries within 18 months.

Surgical care system partners will begin to manage to all priority level targets as the Patient Assessment Process is evaluated and confirmed.

### **Panel To Review Patient Assessment Process**

Implementation of SSCN's new Patient Assessment Process is bringing us closer to our goal of ensuring that Saskatchewan's health system effectively provides surgery according to each patient's level of need.

The Patient Assessment Process standardizes the way in which surgeons determine a patient's relative need for surgery. This process uses a common set of questions to assess the patient's situation, while taking into account the urgency of the specific procedure required. This standardized method of determining level of need will help to ensure that patients are assessed fairly and consistently across the province.

The vast majority of specialists in regional and provincial hospitals are now assessing patients using the patient assessment tools, within the province-wide system.

However, recognizing that these new methods and procedures would require thorough evaluation, the SSCN has come together with the Western Canada Waiting List Project to study and analyze the patient assessment tools and scoring process for each specialty. A team of highly experienced and respected professionals has been assembled on the new **Research and Evaluation Working Group**.

This group includes researchers and representatives with a wide variety of backgrounds and experience:

- Dr. Rob Weiler (Co-chair) – Anaesthetist, Saskatoon
- Dr. Tom Noseworthy (Co-chair) – WCWL; Chair, Centre for Health & Policy Studies; Chair, Dept. of Community Health Sciences, University of Calgary
- Dr. Mark Ogrady – Chief of Surgery, Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region
- Dr. David Johnson – Anaesthetist, Saskatoon
- Dr. Derrick Larsen – Executive Director, Research &

Performance Support, RQHR

- Dr. Barbara Spady – WCWL, Edmonton
- Laurie Gander – Health Quality Council
- Candace Bryden – Director of Quality Services, Saskatoon
- Lauren Donnelly – Executive Director, Acute and Emergency Services, Saskatchewan Health
- Trent Truscott – Surgical Registry Office Manager, Regina
- Doug Calder – Director of Specialized Services, Acute and Emergency Services Branch, Saskatchewan Health
- Dr. Sheena McRae – Research Officer, Saskatchewan Health
- Jeff Brown – Project Manager, Saskatchewan Health

Working group members have been asked to:

- Assess the reliability and validity of the patient assessment tools in real world settings and recommend any necessary changes.
- Determine how well the priority criteria scores work when used in combination with procedure-specific urgency profiles.
- Produce guidelines for the interpretation of scores and make recommendations for appropriate use of the priority tools.

The Working Group will report to the SSCN by late fall of 2004 with recommendations for improvements or changes.

### **Significant Progress Made on Surgical Patient Registry**

The SSCN is encouraged by the significant advances that have been made on the Surgical Patient Registry.

The Surgical Patient Registry announced last year is an integral part of the government's overall strategy to improve management of surgical wait lists and ensure fair and timely access to surgery.

The computerized Registry will track all patients waiting for surgery in the province, and generate a wide range of consistent information that will help physicians, Health Regions and Saskatchewan Health manage the surgical care system to best meet the needs of surgical patients.

- All patients in Five Hills, Sunrise, Prince Albert Parkland, Prairie North and Cypress Health Regions are being entered on the Registry.

- Existing Regina Qu'Appelle and Saskatoon Health Region scheduling systems are nearing full integration with the Registry.
- Kelsey Trail, Heartland and Sun Country Health Regions are expected to be participating on the Registry in the near future.

The first reports from the Registry are now available for use by physicians, Operating Room managers and others in Five Hills, Prairie North, Sunrise, and Prince Albert Parkland Health Regions.

Once the Registry is fully operational across the province, it will greatly improve the surgical care system's ability to predict who needs surgery, and the time frame within which it should be done. This will promote the best possible use of resources and system capacity, and will ultimately result in reduced waiting times for patients.

Day to day operations of the Registry will be overseen by a new *Surgical Registry Operations Advisory Subcommittee*, consisting primarily of Regional operating room managers along with the Registry Office Manager and representatives from Saskatchewan Health. This subcommittee will be responsible for ensuring the security and integrity of Registry data and processes, while providing direction regarding improvements to the current Registry software.

### **Surgical Patient Confirmation System to be Established**

It is recognized that the surgical care system is complex, with each surgery involving many health system partners. Often, it is difficult for patients to know where to turn when they have questions about their upcoming surgery.

Currently, the Surgical Registry Office is working with Health Regions to develop a system that will help ensure that patients have access to the information they need. In the near future, the Surgical Patient Registry will begin to generate letters that will be sent to individual patients confirming that they have been placed on a surgical wait list. These letters will provide the appropriate contact information as well as the address of the Saskatchewan Surgical Care Network (SSCN) Web site.

This new method of communicating with patients will be piloted in a selected Health Region in next three to four months. On completion of the pilot, the system will be implemented in other Regions across the province.

## **SSCN Redesigning Surgical Access Web Site**

The SSCN Web site, [www.sasksurgery.ca](http://www.sasksurgery.ca), has been online for one full year, and continues to attract a good volume of traffic. Over the last six months, an average of 67 individual users visited the site each day.

Further re-design of the Web site will continue in phases, due to the complexity of the issues involved and of the Surgical Patient Registry itself. Planned upgrades will allow the Web site to harness the improved surgical care system data produced by the Registry. This information will be used to improve statistical tables, charts and graphs and enable better comparisons of wait times and surgical system performance by region, specialty, common procedure and priority level.

These enhancements will bring increased transparency to the system and give patients a better sense of how long they will wait for their procedure.

It is anticipated the first phase of the redesign will be launched summer 2004.

### **For More Information**

**Visit:** [www.sasksurgery.ca](http://www.sasksurgery.ca)

**Or**

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